

APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT

FOR

OPTICAL SUBSTANCE ANALYZER

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OPTICAL SUBSTANCE ANALYZER

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

5 The present invention relates to sensors and, more specifically, to optical devices for detecting chemical and biological substances.

Description of the Related Art

10 Substance analyzers are used in environmental monitoring, industrial process control, and medical, analytical, and military applications. For example, biological pathogens such as salmonella are often present in meat and poultry products. Since exposure to these pathogens is a health hazard, low concentrations, typically trace amounts, need to be detected quickly and reliably.

15 In an analytical laboratory, specialized techniques such as mass spectrometry, chromatography, electro-chemical analysis, immunoassays, etc., are readily available to detect various chemical and biological substances (i.e., analytes) with great sensitivity and specificity. However, the available techniques are often time-consuming, labor-intensive, and/or relatively expensive. In addition, devices implementing these techniques are not adapted for portable use, nor are they adapted for use outside the
20 laboratory.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

25 Problems in the prior art are addressed, in accordance with the principles of the present invention, by a portable waveguide sensor having one or more gratings adapted to cause a change in the optical characteristics of the sensor in the presence of a particular substance of interest, e.g., a biological pathogen. In one embodiment, the sensor has a waveguide, wherein a plurality of grooves imprinted onto the waveguide form a Bragg grating. The surface of the grooves has a functional layer adapted to bind the pathogen. When the pathogen binds to the functional layer, the binding shifts the spectral reflection
30 band corresponding to the Bragg grating such that a probe light previously reflected by the grating now passes through the grating, thereby indicating the presence of the pathogen. In another embodiment, the sensor has a Mach-Zehnder interferometer (MZI), one arm of which has a resonator formed by two Bragg gratings. The surface of the

resonator between the gratings has a functional layer whereas the Bragg gratings themselves do not have such a layer. Due to multiple reflections within the resonator, light coupled into the MZI interacts with the bound pathogen over a relatively large effective propagation length, which results in a relatively large differential phase shift and therefore advantageously high sensitivity to the pathogen.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 shows a perspective three-dimensional view of a prior-art optical sensor; Figs. 2A-B show an optical sensor according to one embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 3 shows an optical sensing system having an array of sensors similar to the sensor shown in Fig. 2 according to one embodiment of the present invention; and

Figs. 4A-B show an optical sensor according to another embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Reference herein to “one embodiment” or “an embodiment” means that a particular feature, structure, or characteristic described in connection with the embodiment can be included in at least one embodiment of the invention. The appearances of the phrase “in one embodiment” in various places in the specification are not necessarily all referring to the same embodiment, nor are separate or alternative embodiments mutually exclusive of other embodiments.

Fig. 1 shows a perspective three-dimensional view of a prior-art optical sensor **100** disclosed in an article by B. J. Luff, et al., published in J. Lightwave Technology, 1998, Vol. 16, No. 4, p. 583, the teachings of which are incorporated herein by reference. Sensor **100** is a planar waveguide device having a Mach-Zehnder interferometer (MZI) **110** formed on a glass substrate **102**. An isolation layer **104** that covers MZI **110** has an opening **106**, which exposes one arm of the MZI to the environment, while keeping the other arm protected from such exposure. An optical input beam **120** applied to sensor **100** is split into two beam portions as it propagates through MZI **110**, which beam portions then recombine at the output of the MZI to produce an optical output beam **130**. The intensity of beam **130** depends on the differential phase shift between the beam portions at the recombination point. For example, when the differential phase shift is

about $2\pi k$, where k is an integer, the beam portions interfere constructively, which causes beam 130 to have a relatively high intensity. On the other hand, when the differential phase shift is about $(2k+1)\pi$, the beam portions interfere destructively, which causes beam 130 to have a relatively low intensity.

5 To enable detection of a chemical or biological substance of interest, hereafter termed the “analyte,” the surface of the exposed MZI arm within opening 106 is modified with a functional layer, which facilitates adsorption of the analyte onto the surface. Subsequently, when sensor 100 is exposed to the analyte, the analyte binds to the functional layer, thereby changing the arm’s waveguide properties. This change alters the
10 differential phase shift and, as a result, produces a corresponding intensity change of beam 130, which, upon detection, can be related to the presence of the analyte in the environment. However, one problem with sensor 100 is that its sensitivity may be relatively low. This is mostly due to the fact that light coupled into the exposed arm interacts with the adsorbed analyte by way of the evanescent field. Since the evanescent
15 field is relatively weak, a relatively large interaction length is required to produce a detectable intensity change, which results in disadvantageously large and/or impractical MZI structures.

 Figs. 2A-B show an optical sensor 200 according to one embodiment of the present invention. More specifically, Fig. 2A shows a perspective three-dimensional
20 view of sensor 200, and Fig. 2B is an enlarged view of a grooved portion of that sensor. Sensor 200 is a planar waveguide device having a waveguide 208 formed on a substrate 202. Waveguide 208 has a plurality of grooves 212, which form an integrated Bragg grating 214. As known in the art, one property of a Bragg grating is that it can reflect light corresponding to a relatively narrow spectral band while transmitting all other light.
25 For example, grating 214 can be fabricated to have a reflection band with a center wavelength of λ_0 and a spectral width of $\Delta\lambda$, where the spectral width is the wavelength difference between the band points having one half of the reflectivity corresponding to the center wavelength. In one implementation, λ_0 and $\Delta\lambda$ are about 1550 nm and 0.1 nm, respectively, and the reflectivity at λ_0 is about 100%.

30 To enable analyte detection, the surface of grooves 212 is modified with a functional layer similar to that of sensor 100. In Fig. 2A, the functional layer is schematically illustrated by the Y-shaped symbols connected to grooves 212. When

sensor **200** is exposed to the analyte (schematically illustrated by diamonds in Fig. 2A), the analyte binds to the functional layer, thereby changing optical properties of grating **214**. For example, for a periodic groove structure having a period of Λ (see Fig. 2B), the center wavelength is given by the following equation:

5
$$\lambda_0 = 2\Lambda n_{eff} \quad (1)$$

where n_{eff} is the effective index of refraction corresponding to grating **214**. When the analyte binds to the functional layer, it changes n_{eff} and therefore λ_0 . Suppose that an optical input beam **220** coupled into waveguide **208** has wavelength λ'_0 corresponding to the center wavelength of grating **214** in the absence of the analyte. Then, an optical
10 output beam **230** will have a very low intensity due to the Bragg reflection. However, when sensor **200** is exposed to the analyte, the analyte binding changes n_{eff} and shifts the center wavelength to λ''_0 . This shift reduces the grating reflectivity at λ'_0 , which causes the intensity of beam **230** to increase, thereby indicating the presence of the analyte in the environment. Advantageously, the sensitivity of sensor **200** is improved compared to the
15 sensitivity of device **100**. The improvement is mostly due to the corrugated profile of grating **214**, which increases the interaction cross-section of the probe light with the bound analyte in sensor **200** compared to that in the evanescent-field-limited structure of sensor **100**.

Fig. 3 shows an optical sensing system **300** according to one embodiment of the
20 present invention. System **300** has an arrayed waveguide grating (AWG) **340**, whose output ports are coupled to a sensor **352**. Sensor **352** is an arrayed sensor having three sensors **350a-c**, each of which is similar to sensor **200** of Fig. 2. However, sensors **350a-c** differ from each other in that (1) each sensor has a different center wavelength (i.e., λ_a , λ_b , and λ_c , respectively) and (2) each sensor has a different functional layer adapted to
25 bind a different analyte. Functionalization of surface layers to enable analyte-specific conjugation is well known in the bio-technological arts and is described, for example, in a book by G.T. Hermanson, "Bioconjugate Techniques," Academic Press, San Diego, 1996, the teachings of which are incorporated herein by reference. Therefore, system **300** is adapted to detect three different analytes. One skilled in the art will appreciate that a
30 sensing system adapted to detect two or four or more different analytes may be similarly designed. In a preferred embodiment, AWG **340** and sensor **352** are implemented in an integrated waveguide circuit.

In operation, a multiplexed optical input beam **320** having wavelengths λ_a , λ_b , and λ_c is applied to AWG **340**. Each component is then routed to the appropriate output port and coupled into the corresponding waveguide **308**, where it impinges upon Bragg grating **314**. Light passed through the gratings is measured using an array of photo-

5 detectors (not shown) to sense the presence of the different analytes, e.g., as described above for sensor **200**.

Figs. 4A-B show an optical sensor **400** according to another embodiment of the present invention. More specifically, Fig. 4A shows a perspective three-dimensional view of sensor **400**, and Fig. 4B shows an enlarged view of an optical resonator **416** of that sensor. Sensor **400** has a Mach-Zehnder interferometer (MZI) **410** formed on a

10 substrate **402** and covered by an isolation layer **404** similar to MZI **110** of sensor **100** (Fig. 1). However, one difference between MZI **410** and MZI **110** is that the exposed arm of MZI **410** has two Bragg gratings **414a-b**, which form resonator **416**. Each grating **414** is formed with grooves **412** imprinted onto a waveguide **408** as shown in Fig. 4B. The

15 reflectivity of each Bragg grating is appropriately chosen to couple light in and out of resonator **416** and to generate multiple round trips of the light within the resonator.

A section of waveguide **408** between gratings **414a-b** has a functional layer indicated in Fig. 4B by the Y-shaped symbols. In a preferred implementation, grooves **412** do not have such a layer. This ensures that the resonator's optical properties are not

20 substantially altered by the exposure to the analyte. Resonator **416** thus mostly serves to increase the effective interaction length of light within the exposed arm of MZI **410** with the bound analyte (schematically illustrated by diamonds in Fig. 4B). Due to the increased interaction length, the differential phase shift generated in MZI **410** is significantly greater than that in a similarly sized MZI **110** (Fig. 1). Therefore, the

25 sensitivity of sensor **400** is advantageously improved compared to the sensitivity of sensor **100**.

While this invention has been described with reference to illustrative embodiments, this description is not intended to be construed in a limiting sense. Although Bragg gratings of the invention are described as being implemented with

30 grooves imprinted onto a waveguide, other grating implementations known in the art may similarly be used. The gratings may have reflection bands that have different center wavelengths and/or different shapes. Waveguide resonators of the invention may be

implemented using different light-reflecting structures as known in the art. Various modifications of the described embodiments, as well as other embodiments of the invention, which are apparent to persons skilled in the art to which the invention pertains are deemed to lie within the principle and scope of the invention as expressed in the

5 following claims.

Although the steps in the following method claims, if any, are recited in a particular sequence with corresponding labeling, unless the claim recitations otherwise imply a particular sequence for implementing some or all of those steps, those steps are not necessarily intended to be limited to being implemented in that particular sequence.